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THE EFFECT OF THE SCHOOL ORGANIZATION ON TEACHERS' EFFICACY AND SATISFACTION

Abstract

The present study was designed in order to look for the relationships among organizational dimensions of school teachers' responses of work satisfaction and perceptions of efficacy at work.

For that purpose 280 secondary school teachers chosen from the six educational districts in Israel were required to complete the teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction questionnaire on teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction, the amount of control teachers have over classroom conditions, the school level measures such as school size, average SES and average achievement in matriculation exams and the social organization of school variables such as, sense of community, principal style and student misbehaviour. Results reveal that major sources of teachers work efficacy are intrinsic: teachers' sense of control over their environment, students' level of ability, school size, strong principal leadership, and climate of support.

Keywords: Teacher work efficacy, Teacher work satisfaction, School organization, Teacher classroom control, Principal leadership

Introduction

The permanent interest in the organization of schools stems mainly as a result of the research on effective schools (Cheng, 1997; Silver, 1994).

Organizational features are increasingly seen as important determinants of effective schools (Hoy & Ferguson, 1985; Chubb & Moe, 1990), with frequently cited features including the school culture (Sarason, 1996; Gaziel, 1997).

Researchers have had difficulty however in demonstrating direct empirical links between school organization or climate and student outcomes. The source of this difficulty is both methodological and substantive. Briefly, the methodological difficulty stems from school effects operationalizing mainly as aggregates. Substantively, it may be more appropriate to conceptualize the link between schools and students as indirect mediated by teachers. In this view school organization would influence how teachers view their work and how they teach. Teachers perceptions and practices would, in turn, affect students' learning.

The second link between the practices and attitudes of teachers and student outcomes was empirically validated by Rosenholtz (1989).

In the present article I focus on the first link in this chain, namely, the features of school organization and teachers' outcomes – while there are many ways in which schools may affect teachers and teaching, I narrowed my inquiry to the organizational dimensions of schools and to teachers expressions of satisfaction with their work and perceptions of their efficacy in doing that work.

Background

Efficacy in psychological terms is a cognitive process that involves identifying a goal, assessing the necessary effort and abilities to achieve the goal and predicting the outcomes (Bandura, 1997). Satisfaction is an effective response to achieving that goal.

Efficacy for teachers is based on their perceived ability to affect student learning while satisfaction derives from the value that teachers place on this activity.

In an organizational environment efficacy and satisfaction typically do not reflect expectations of a particular occurrence or task. Rather, they address workers' more general feelings about the daily operation of the job, based on cumulative experience and assessment of work environment. Efficacy and satisfaction operate as two parts of a whole (Maehr, 1997). For teachers teaching different groups and sometimes different subjects to different groups, efficacy and satisfaction reflect general perceptions of the classroom environment.

Social psychology has identified both intrinsic and extrinsic sources of information about performance as important determinants of professional satisfaction and efficacy. Regarding the intrinsic influences Dembo and Gibson (1985) reported that the most influential factors on teachers' self-efficacy is the type of students in the classroom and the amount of control a teacher has in determining the classroom environment. As regarding the first factor fundamental to determining their efficacy and satisfaction is the expectations teachers hold for students. If students are seen as having low ability teachers tend to lower their expectations of their own ability to teach them. As regarding the second factor a sense of control over one's environment may contribute to perceptions of efficacy by determining how intrinsic work goals are established and the criteria by which success is measured. Furthermore self-efficacy is based also on how much flexibility teachers have in selecting materials and planning the daily agenda. Teachers that control their curriculum and materials can change the conditions of the learning environment (Rosenholtz, 1989).

As regarding extrinsic influences, in hierarchical organizations access to evaluative information about performance reflects the authority structure of the organization. Such access depends on one's proximity to the technical core of the operation. On the basis of the type of interaction that takes place over the technical core in school organization two types of authority structures have been identified: loosely coupled and integrated. How schools are organized as workplaces strongly influences teachers' efficacy and satisfaction (Rosenholtz, 1989).

Loosely coupled structure (Weick, 1976) refers to an organizational structure in which the activities of person A have little impact on the performance of person B and vice versa. Teachers in such organizations work in isolation not only from their peers but also from their supervisors which limits their knowledge of school activities outside their classroom. In loosely coupled organizations, which characterized public schools, close interaction among different groups or even different members of the same group are often assume to result in conflict since various agendas typically require different processes and procedures to resolve daily problems (Hoy & Ferguson, 1985). Such schools develop a bureaucratic legalistic authority structure, in which members must move through a formalized mechanism to interact with other members while collegial interaction is typically limited.

Consequently, the only source of information available to teachers about their own performance lies in the classroom.

Conversely, in an integrated structure schools may exhibit a strong sense of central purpose and a shared value system about education and this characterizes effective schools (Rutter & Maughan, 2002). Schools with a strong central purpose work to coordinate the technical core operation with this purpose. Thus their teachers would regularly monitor operations as a larger scale rather than only in their own classroom. While such schools may operate under bureaucratic structures, such linkages among the staff facilitate communication about their activities, the sharing of difficulties and solutions, and professional interaction to educate students (Townsend, 2001). Because of this collegial communication a participant in such an organization culture has access to both intrinsic and extrinsic sources of information about his or her performance. That state contributes to higher levels of job satisfaction and self-efficacy.

Focus of the research

Schools operate under some degree of bureaucratic linkage between management authority and the technical operations of the school (teaching). The degree of consensus about goals and the structure of the daily communications among different members may however either reinforce these bureaucratic separations or act to overcome them. In both authority structures loosely coupled or integrated most teachers' work takes place in classroom with little supervision or evaluation. In loosely coupled structures classroom environment provides teachers with their only source of information about their performance. Thus teachers' control over the environment is hypothesized to determine their efficacy and satisfaction associated with their work.

On the other hand in the integrated structure classroom activities are supplemented by a consensus among the group on the school's agenda and communication about teaching that occurs outside the classroom, with less reliance on classroom operation to determine one's performance. Personal control over specific classroom domains such as the choice of materials or pacing, may be supplemented by more input into school – wide choices and possibly more consensus about classroom environments or a greater contribution to school goals. Organizational efficacy may thus contribute to the efficacy of an individual's performance.

We hypothesized that although control over the intrinsic sources of classroom performance determines a teacher's sense of personal efficacy this relationship is mitigated by structural features. We further hypothesized that such factors are related to the organization of school, in particular to members' opportunities to communicate about the goals of the organization and their work within it. Group consensus reduces the uncertainty and ambiguity of role factors that make general functioning difficult. Therefore, in schools with a strong communitarian organization and a shared value system the relationship between individual classroom control and teachers' self-efficacy is attenuated. Schools with loosely coupled structures and weak cultural linkages are likely to exhibit a strong relationship between a teacher's individual control of the classroom environment and his or her efficacy.

Method

Sample

The sample included 400 full time job teachers chosen randomly from 30 secondary schools from all parts of Israel, who were asked by research assistants, after having the consent of the principals, to complete the following questionnaires, 280 answered (70%) – which is a high response in the Israeli setting.

Measures

Teacher-level dependent measure. Teacher self efficacy and teacher job satisfaction as one construct (although in the literature they are separated), because of the high correlation among teachers between both constructs. This factor includes four items measuring self-efficacy: “To what extent do you feel successful in providing the kind of education you would like to provide for most of your students?” and “I sometimes feel it is a waste of time to try to do my best as a teacher” (reversed coded) and satisfaction “I usually look forward to each working day at this school” and “Am usually satisfied with my job in this school”. The answers based on a Likert-type scale.

Teacher level independent measures. The amount of control teachers have over classroom conditions; influence over the selection of textbooks and instructional materials, instructional content, teaching techniques, the disciplining of students, the assignment of homework (1 = none control, 5 = complete control).

School level independent measures. These fall into two types: school demographics and aspects of social organization. The demographic variables considered and found as related in previous literature (Newman et al, 1999), school size, average socio-economic status – the percentage of students coming from underdeveloped areas at school (poor socio-economic status), and average achievement (in the matriculation exams during 2011 school year). As regarding the social organization of schools, the measures included: perceived sense of community (e.g. I was accepted and respected as a colleague by most staff members, or the school seems like a big family), students' disorderly behaviour (e.g. the level of students misbehaviours which interfere in my teaching), the degree to which principals are considered leaders (e.g. the principal deals effectively with pressures from outside the school that might interfere in my teaching; the principal sets priorities, makes plans, and sees that they are carried out), the staff's participation in school decision making (e.g. I have a great amount of influence upon school policies); staff are involved in making decisions that affect them (1 = none; 5 = a great deal), the encouragement of innovation administrators (e.g. the principal is interested in innovative and new ideas); responsiveness to the staff (e.g. the school administrator behaviour toward the staff is supportive and encouraging or the school administrator knows the problems faced by the staff). The answers to all the questions based on a Likert-type scale.

It is important to note that since these measures were created as school aggregates of teachers' perceptions, their variances are smaller than are those of teacher-level measures from which they were aggregated. It is well-known that aggregate variables suffer from high correlations, partly because of restricted variability.

Hypotheses

It was expected that:

1. Smaller schools have positive effects upon teachers' efficacy and satisfaction. Teacher control (pedagogical autonomy) would have a positive effect upon teachers' efficacy and satisfaction.
2. Principal's leadership, sense of community and administrative responsiveness would have a positive effect upon teachers' efficacy and satisfaction.

Results

The inter-correlations among variables are as follows:

Average teacher control is negligibly related to all variables except for staff influence on decision making ($r=.532$) and school size ($r=-.485$).

Sense of community is strongly related to principal leadership ($r=.495$); to encouragement of innovation ($r=.552$); and to administrative responsiveness ($r=.455$) and moderately and negatively related to disorder behaviour ($r=.359$).

Principal leadership is strongly related to encouragement of innovations ($r=.779$) and to administrative responsiveness ($r=.685$) and to staff influence ($r=.556$), suggesting that these variables tap a common construct and should not be included individually. Furthermore, staff influence, innovation and responsiveness are also significantly interrelated ($p<.05$).

No significant correlations were found between those variables to average SES, or knowledge of courses.

The relationship between teacher efficacy and teacher control and if that relationship affected when the types of students taught are taken into account reveal that a strong relationship was found between a sense of efficacy among teachers and their perceptions of control ($r=.596$; $p<.01$), when the ability of the students who are being taught are taken into account, the average relationship between student ability and teacher efficacy was also significant ($r=.555$, $p<.01$).

Two school demographic factors were found related to efficacy: Average SES and size.

For SES estimated effects (.0493, $p<.01$); for size estimated effects (.0425, $p<.01$). Both relationships are positive, indicating that teachers feel more efficacious in high SES and large schools. Three measures of social organizations are strongly related to mean efficacy: teacher control (estimated effects=.0397; $p<.001$); community (estimated effects=.0321; $p<.01$); principal leadership (estimated effects=.0528, $p<.01$). One measure has a strongly negative effect – student disorder (estimated effects=-.0521; $p<.01$). All those relationships support the stated hypotheses. Schools in which the teachers have greater control over their teaching with a stronger sense of community, and those in which the principal, is seen as a strong leader have more efficacious teachers. Schools with less orderly environments are much less likely to have efficacious teachers. These relationships are, with mean efficacy, adjusted for differences in perceived control and students' ability within schools.

We found that neither the demographics of teachers' race and salary or experience affected the variation in efficacy.

Discussion

The literature describes two sources of information, intrinsic and extrinsic, upon which teachers judge their own efficacy and, hence, base their satisfaction. If these two sources of information are defined narrowly (intrinsic sources involve the classroom and extrinsic sources come from salary and external recognition), then our results show that by far the major source of efficacy is intrinsic. Both the students' level of ability and the degree to which teachers sense that they control classroom practices are both strongly associated with efficacy. The extrinsic factor of salary (based less on merit or competence than on experience or education) is unrelated. If on the other hand, we define extrinsic sources as teachers' perceptions of their place in the hierarchy of power in the school, then such information becomes essential. Public schools being more likely to be loosely coupled, bureaucratic organizations.

In terms of structure, the results on the effects of principal leadership (Hypothesis 3) are interesting. In a loosely coupled school organization, administrators' activities are separated from the technical core of operations (instruction). Instead principals obtain resources and protect the core from potentially hostile and disruptive forces in the external environment. The measure of principal leadership includes these elements ("gets resources for the school", and "deals effectively with pressures from outside the school that might interfere with teaching") in addition to traditional measures of leadership ("sets priorities", and "lets staff members know what expected of them"). Principal leadership was positively associated with both efficacy and control. That is, in schools in which teachers sense strong leadership, their feelings of self efficacy and control over their classroom environment are stronger.

We offer two interpretations of this finding, focusing on two functions of principals that teachers may see as characteristics of strong leadership, buffering and delegating. In loosely coupled schools, the buffering functions allow teachers autonomy in managing their classrooms. The classroom thus becomes an even more important source of information about the teachers' performance. A further relationship between perceived principal leadership and the amount of control teachers experience over classroom decisions may be related to the "delegating" function of leadership. Strong instructional leaders try to foster leadership within the staff with the aim of generating positive student outcomes for the school. It may be that in schools in which teachers see the principal as a strong instructional leader, the organizational division of labour is more differentiated among teachers and strong teachers are more influential. That is, individual teachers may have specific leadership responsibilities and teachers with less responsibility may sense the difference more keenly. This relationship may thus reflect the more general dynamics of interaction among staff members and the delegation of leadership.

Results indicate that a school's average amount of teacher control is unrelated to teachers' efficacy. Nor is average control related to a principal's leadership. This odd pattern of relationships illustrates the essential difference in meaning between the group level version and the individual level versions of the same measure. The interpretation of aggregated control is very different from the interpretation of the control each teacher perceives. It is this within a school's control mechanism and its

association with efficacy, which is affected by a principal's leadership, rather than the average level of control in school.

With regard to school size. Contrary to our hypothesis, larger schools are positively related to teachers' efficacy. It support some previous studies however, it could be explained logically. Larger schools have more of the resources teachers think they need, and teachers thus feel more efficacious in their working environments.

The strongest predictor of teacher efficacy is community. Our finding are in line with previous studies. We consider the empirical validation of this link as important. Schools in which teachers feel more efficacious are likely to be environments in which human relationships are supportive ("you can count on most staff members to help", a great deal of cooperative effort, "a big family"). Where teachers share beliefs and values about the central mission of the school and where they feel accepted and respected.

The results of these studies have shown that several elements of school organization are strongly related to teacher efficacy (Herriot & Firestone, 1984). They have also shown that teachers are more efficacious when they have more control over their own classroom practices. Furthermore, fostering cooperative environments and allowing teachers reasonable autonomy in their classroom practices are more likely to foster the efficacy of teachers.

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